

The Supper

JOAN FULLER

"The stew is delicious, Miss Prand," he said, and the tight bodice of her dress seemed suddenly to pinch with the expansion of her pleasure. She knotted her fingers together in her lap under the edge of the table cloth.

"You really like stew, Mr. Crawley?" she asked. She had made it very carefully but she had been afraid it was too ordinary.

"Very much."

He was such a tall and handsome man and with such a voice. She hadn't had anyone like him rent her front room for a long time. Of course she didn't give any of the other lodgers' meals, but he had seemed so anxious and he looked kind of thin. Besides, what did one matter. And just cooking for herself and fixing Aunt Ann's tray she was getting kind of rusty.

Aunt Ann didn't wholly approve. She'd even said "Humph." But she didn't approve of anything now she had arthritis. She'd never approved of much before.

But her mouth was really sour that way because she was in pain. Only it was irritating to see that sour mouth and false front of curls all the time. It was wicked to be irritated, but you couldn't help it if something like that bothered you, any more than you could help being amused by something.

And her voice seemed to be getting more querulous every day. She probably suffered more than she let people know. But when she saw her supper she hadn't had to say "Humph," in quite that way and pull her eyebrows down. And she hadn't even praised the apple pie or the

stew. And they were good. She might have said something.

"I — I like stew too," Miss Prand said. "And it's easy to make. These days you've got to use your left-over's too."

"I should say so," he said and she watched him chew for a moment, a muscle in his temple moving in and out. It had a fascinating rhythm. She looked down at the table with her best blue china and the silver sugar-bowl Aunt Ann was so proud of.

"What is your business, Mr. Crawley? I don't believe you told me."

"Oh, I'm in shoes, Miss Prand. Shrift's Company."

"How interesting."

"Well — Some people might disagree with me, but it is interesting. And I figure I'm doing a real service to people. Cheap shoes are a necessity to poor people and I get a kick out of making it so they can have them."

"I think that's wonderful. And you'd meet so many types. I'd think it would be *very* interesting."

"Yes, it really is. The other day a woman with a little girl came in and the soles of the kid's sandals were flopping clear open. She was walking around on her bare feet, almost. The mother said to me, 'How much could I get her shoes for?' And when I told her only a dollar, she almost cried. It's things like that that make it a swell job. You really feel like you're doing something."

His voice was so deep and nice. It was quite cultured, too. He must have come from a good family and gone to a good school. And it was wonderful of him

to give such a really dull business a kind of glamour. He didn't just go along accepting life, he made something more of it. That's what everyone should do. Her grandmother was like that. She could make even a common old piece of walnut like the side-board behind him seem pretty just by saying she got it at an antique shop and that maybe it belonged to President Taft or someone.

Good heavens, the daisy drawing over the side-board was crooked. If she got up and straightened it now that would be so obvious and if she didn't he'd think her an untidy housekeeper. If he thought that he might move out. Of course, now he had his back to it and maybe when he shoved back from the table he'd go right on into the living room. She'd told him he could use the living room to read in and if he liked it, maybe he'd even bring his slippers down. She'd like him really to feel at home. And she could sit and sew and he'd read and maybe someday she could even play for him on the organ. Of course, it was a little flat but she could have Mr. Landen come in and fix it up maybe.

She hoped he liked the salad. He wasn't eating it very rapidly, but the stew was almost gone. And there was the apple pie for desert. Perhaps if she were *very* careful she could slip around behind him, when she got up for the pie, and straighten the picture so he wouldn't notice. She could say she wanted a knife. That would be the thing to do.

"I hope you like apple pie, Mr. Crawley," she said.

"Apple pie? My, this is a haven. Home-made apple pie?"

"Oh, yes. My grand-mother's recipe."

"It's unbelievable. Some special god must have sent me here, Miss Prand."

She smiled. "How about some more

stew?"

"Not if there's apple pie. I want plenty of room."

"All right," she said, "I'll clear the table."

She was very careful as she moved the dishes to the kitchen because Aunt Ann would be furious if she broke anything. And she'd draw her eyebrows down and scold dreadfully and make her feel like a child. Of course, it was a little juvenile to sneak out the best china and the silver sugar bowl. But the poor man needed something nice to look at. Most boarding houses were so dreadful. And when Grandma died and there wasn't any money, she'd decided to rent rooms, but always to be clean and gentle about it and if any one ate there to treat him like a guest. And she'd always done it. Even if she had had a hard time when Aunt Ann got arthritis.

She stacked the dishes carefully on the sink and the ones that wouldn't go there, on the kitchen cabinet. Then she took the napkin off the pie. It did look good. Grandma's recipe was the best she'd ever found. Everything Grandma did she did well. Even just thinking about her sometimes made you feel a little inadequate. Even her quilts were perfect.

The one on Mr. Crawley's bed was a little worn. But the blue flying star one was still unused. She'd put it on his bed directly after supper.

As she dug the knife down into the center of the pie and sectioned off a quarter, she remembered the picture. It wouldn't be a bad lie to go for another knife, though. She went back through the swinging door and he smiled at her.

"I'll just slip behind here and get a knife for the pie," she said. He pulled his chair up for her to go by, though

there was plenty of room. That was very nice. He had quite beautiful manners for a shoe salesman. He must be a man who thought, too, or he wouldn't feel as he did about children who needed shoes.

She opened the drawer and picked out a knife, and as she reached in the drawer, tried to lean forward and touch the corner of the picture. But she couldn't quite reach it. She'd forgotten the side-board was so wide. This was too exasperating. She closed the drawer then, and drawing her lips, reached with the knife-end.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Oh —" she looked at the knife a little foolishly. "This picture was a little crooked. I can't abide crooked pictures, so I was trying to straighten it," she said then.

He stood up. "Here let me," he said. His long arms reached in front of her and he pushed up the hanging corner just the proper shade. "There," he said, and smiled down at her.

"Thank you," she said, but her heart felt very large and almost sad inside her,

He didn't mind, and he had such a kind face. He liked her and he didn't mind about the picture.

"I'll get the pie," she said breathlessly after a moment and almost fled toward the kitchen. But in the door she had to look at him once more, at his calm and friendly smile. Perhaps he'd like some cheese.

She turned, smiling a little timidly, with her hand on the frame. "Would you like a bit of cheese?" she asked, but her words faded a little at the end. His face was very odd. He was staring at her, with an expression of pity that was almost scornful about his mouth and eyes. Though the look was a fleeting one and he blinked and smiled at her, she had seen it and when he said "I'd love it!" heartily, she frowned.

She went on into the kitchen a little slowly and she stood a moment looking at the pie. Somehow it didn't look as good as it had, and a quarter seemed very large. She touched her hair vaguely, looking down at it. And then she got the cheese,

Song Without Music

LUCY KAUFMAN

A song in the night
lingering among the lilacs, in the dew
reflecting moonlight,
returns again the old lost love, the you
I never could forget.
How strange it is that music I once knew
becomes so alien when listened to
alone!

Was it long
ago that our swift moment's singing died?
And now the song
unsung is heard, remembered but denied.